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STATE FOR NEA/IPA, NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR, USAID FOR  
BORODIN, JOINT STAFF FOR LT GEN SELVA

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SUBJECT: EXTENDED HOURS FOR PASSENGERS, INCOMING CARGO AT  
ALLENBY BRIDGE CROSSING

REF: AMMAN 1787

1. (SBU) Summary. The GOI implemented extended hours for passengers crossing the Allenby (King Hussein) Bridge for a two-month trial period, starting August 4. According to ConGen's Palestinian contacts, the passenger crossing remains crowded, but operations are running smoothly on both sides. Cargo hours, however, were extended only for incoming Jordanian goods, not outgoing Palestinian shipments. End summary.

#### GOI Announces New Schedule

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2. (U) On July 8, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu announced at a ministerial committee meeting that the Allenby Bridge crossing would be open 24/7 for cargo "to alleviate the situation for the Palestinian economy," according to press reports. During a July 28 follow-up visit to the Allenby Bridge with Vice Premier Shalom and Transportation Minister Katz, Netanyahu instructed GOI officials to extend operating hours for passengers for a two-month pilot period beginning August 4. Neither announcement was coordinated with the Jordanians (reftel); however, the Jordanian side extended their hours to match the new schedule.

#### Extended Hours for Passengers Welcomed

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3. (SBU) ConGen's Palestinian contacts uniformly report that the 24-step procedure to cross between the West Bank and Jordan is an onerous one, involving multiple buses, waiting areas, and security checks that can turn the 2-hour commute between Jerusalem and Amman into a 16-hour ordeal. Most welcomed the extended hours for passengers (0800-2400, Sunday-Thursday) which were implemented as scheduled on August 4. They noted that the real area for improvement was in the treatment of Palestinians at the crossing.

4. (SBU) Following a coordination meeting with Israeli Customs on July 30, the Palestinian bus company that shuttles Palestinian passengers from Jericho to the Allenby Bridge added 8-9 additional buses with capacity for 30-40 passengers each the first day, and 12 additional buses the second day, with the last bus departing at 2200 from Jericho. ConGen contacts report that there is now a steady stream of passengers throughout the day, instead of in "fits and starts." While long lines remain, passengers told ConGenoff that they are "very happy" with the extended hours. The new schedule is reportedly in effect for a two-month trial period, after which the GOI will reassess if demand continues to warrant longer hours.

## Extended Cargo Hours for Inbound Cargo Only

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15. (SBU) Despite Netanyahu's July 8 announcement of extended cargo hours, Israeli Customs officials told ConGen contacts that the new hours would only be applicable for inbound cargo from Jordan, not outbound Palestinian goods. Halaika, a Bethlehem-based stone exporter, reports that one of its trucks attempted to cross the afternoon of August 4, but Israeli Customs told the driver to return the following morning during regular operating hours. The outgoing cargo traffic at Allenby is only about 20 loaded trucks every day (compared to 60 trucks per day from Jordan to the West Bank), and many Palestinian exporters consider the current operating hours to be sufficient. The real obstacle to the flow of Palestinian goods, they said, was the costly back-to-back requirement, which forces them to hire Jordanian trucks and drivers to transport their goods to the final destination -- often as far afield as Iraq or the Gulf.

WALLES